

# Happy Family

Benjamin T. Liu

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David Hays

Department of Radio-Television-Film

Senior Lecturer

## **ABSTRACT**

Author: Benjamin T. Liu

Title: Happy Family

Supervising Professor: Buzz Hays

Creative film thesis. Shot in stereo-3D with Austin locations and actors. Story is about a family and the lives of its individual members, everything taking place inside the family restaurant. The aesthetics of the film draw from realistic and dramatic documentary style. The piece also is meant to preserve a slice of Asian American culture at a particular moment in time.

## **Acknowledgments**

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For my project I decided to produce a feature length film. The final cut of it will be 15-20 minutes, however there are many scenes that aren't in the final cut.

The idea came to me in the summer between my junior and sophomore year. I wanted to do a feature length film set entirely in a family restaurant and focus on the relationship between the family members. Originally it was supposed to feature five main characters in the main family as well as a few other characters, employees at the restaurants and grandparents. Eventually this was cut down to just the five main family members, the father, mother, older brother, middle sister and younger brother. It was originally supposed to be written in two languages, Chinese and English, but this was eventually simplified to just English and the cast was not only Chinese and the restaurant was not Chinese as well.

## **I. PROCESS**

There were many changes that were due to the rocky production process. We struggled to find an actor who could play the Father part convincingly. We struggled to find a location that we could reliably shoot at. We had a very low budget and it was a struggle all the way to find cast, crew, location and many other necessities for the project. Nevertheless the project continued as we made many adjustments according to our situation.

The original bilingual script idea had to be dropped as there weren't any 1<sup>st</sup> generation immigrants who could speak both Chinese and English that were wanted to be in the project. The idea of a Chinese American family as the main characters was modified as the final family ended up being a Korean father, a Vietnamese mother, a Chinese older brother, a Filipino sister and a

Taiwanese younger brother. We rolled with the diversity in the casting as we modified the script to represent a more general Asian American experience rather than a more specific Chinese American one. The extraneous other characters such as a younger 1<sup>st</sup> generation immigrant who worked at the restaurant and the grandparents were scrapped due to an inability to find actors, and so we focused on the five family members alone.

We originally planned to shoot at a Chinese restaurant close to campus. The restaurant allowed us to shoot but last minute switched management and we lost a lot of work and were left scrambling to find an alternative location. It turned out to be a blessing in disguise as the next restaurant we asked was incredibly accommodating as the owners were very helpful. They gave us the keys and basically let us do whatever, whenever as long as it didn't interfere with their business.

Although we started shooting much later than planned, in March, two months before the final deadline, we were able to finish shooting the entire script, which at the time seemed impossible. It was very tiring and difficult as many of the scenes are very nuanced and challenging for the actors, requiring a lot of memorization, changes of pace and precise execution and timing. We had to in some cases do many scenes over and over again until we could get it right. Because we were working with five actors who all had other jobs and responsibilities, it was very difficult to coordinate shooting days where everyone was free. It was also difficult to align these with when equipment from the school was available to be reserved and checked out. Because the schedule was so erratic it was also difficult to find crew who could commit to shooting days that were always shifting schedules.

The first semester working on the project was spent mainly on finding actors and finding a location. The hardest character to cast was the role of the Father as there aren't many older Asian male actors, for a long time it seemed like there wasn't any way we would find an actor who could play the part. We looked and we eventually found someone who was willing to act. Eventually he quit as other responsibilities took away his ability to commit to the whole project. After a semester of searching we finally gave up and I decided to switch to a completely different idea that was much simpler, would cast only college-age actors, and we began to search for new actors.

After a few days, we gave up on this new project and went back to producing the original project. What was driving the change in the direction was a fear of failure, which made me want to not take any risks and go with a project that wasn't what I had set out to do, but I knew I would be able to complete. I didn't know if we would be able to find an actor to play the most important part, but I also didn't know that we wouldn't and so I decided to continue, not knowing whether it would succeed, with the mindset of, if it fails, it fails.

With the little bit of footage that we shot we were able to make a trailer. With the trailer we made we were able to give a more convincing pitch that we were serious about the film to potential actors and crew. In early January I posted a casting and crew call on a few local acting websites with a link to the trailer. The response we received was quite large. There were a lot who were interested in working on the project, however there was still not any response for the lead role of the Father character.

As we moved on to auditioning the actors and actresses who expressed interest we asked if they knew any older male actors who could play the role. Some said they did and I was introduced to Frank. We were then able to cast and move forward.

We scheduled to shoot on three Saturdays through March and April. Despite the fact that we had each Saturday all day to shoot, it was nevertheless an impossibly difficult amount of shooting to get through. As we worked to lock extras, props and crew, the entire schedule fell through as the restaurant we planned to shoot at suddenly changed management and part of this change was that they would now be opening on Saturdays, and we no longer would be able to shoot on those days.

We received this news the last week of February. We were already scrapped for time to shoot and the chances that we would be able to find another location and re-plan all the arrangements that we had made in time when we had invested so much time in planning for the first location and building a good relationship with the owners who would no longer work there, seemed so impossible. For the second time the project was completely scrapped and we began to think of something else we could shoot to turn in for the thesis assignment.

When Frank received the news however, he was not phased at all and immediately suggested two other possible restaurants. I was encouraged as he assured me that with the number of Asian restaurants in the city of Austin we would almost be guaranteed to find a suitable location in time. The location that we eventually found to shoot at was Thanh Nhi Vietnamese restaurant. We told the owners that we wanted to come during their day off which was Monday and shoot. They rejected us and told us to come instead between 2p.m. and 6p.m. when they were least busy. We told them that we would probably make a lot of noise, as some of



the scenes involve tear-filled shouting, and that was why we wanted to shoot on Monday. They said it was fine, not on Monday, but to come any day besides that two to six and make some noise.

As we rehearsed on location the owners expressed more interest in what we were doing and developed a rapport with the actress playing the mother character who was also Vietnamese. She asked them if we could shoot on Monday and they immediately gave us the keys.

The next two months were a grueling whirlwind schedule of rehearsals, shooting, checking equipment in and out, and editing. One of the difficulties was finding crew members who could adapt to such a demanding and constantly shifting schedule. Luckily one of the actors knew a friend through his Taekwondo class. She was a Radio-Television-Film major interested in doing Director of Photography work. He mentioned that I was working on a thesis film and she became very interested after reading the script. Her name was Sidi and she became a very essential crew member as she had the exact skills we needed and was available to work on our shoot days.

Throughout this time I was continually indebted to the good work of others who were willing to make the film happen. The actors gave it their best time and time again, even when the scenes were long and challenging. The owners continually accommodated our presence and handed us the keys to shoot on their day off. Even when they lent their key to their son who was re-painting and were down to only their spare, they would still lend us the key asking only that we would return it in time for them to open the restaurant the next day. Because of the erratic nature of the shooting, I often had to ask friends and classmates last minute if they wanted to

help crew the project. I was indebted time and time again to friends who would last minute drop what they were doing to come work for three or four hours on my project.

Slowly but surely the filming was completed. We finished shooting the last scene on the last day we were still allowed to have equipment checked out. It seemed impossible that we could shoot all fifty pages of the script in the time allotted but somehow it happened and we didn't drop a single scene. We edited as we went along and while we could only edit a fifteen minute version for the final thesis submission, we plan to finish the full, feature-length movie some time in the future.

## **II. STORY**

The idea for the story itself came to me between my sophomore and junior year. Many of its creative decisions were simply out of practicality. I wanted to theoretically shoot a feature film during my time in college. How could that happen? Decisions such as focusing on five main characters and shooting all in one location were made simply for logistical reasons; the fewer people and places that we had to worry about, the better chances that it would succeed. I thus set to develop a script that would be visually interesting while never changing scenery, as well as dramatically compelling while constrained by a single location and few characters.

I sought to have a mix of visual perspectives while staying within the four walls of the restaurant. This forced me to be creative and think of circumstances within the story that would justify the use of the space in as many ways as possible to achieve some visual variety. Shots of the kitchen, close-ups of food and cooking, night scenes, scenes with all sorts of lighting, angles and camera

movements, I tried to be as expressive as possible with the minimal production value that we had.

The story was difficult not only because of the single location but also because of the five main characters. They each had to have their own individual storylines and yet the plot had to somehow make sense as a whole. The transitions had to be somewhat smooth and overall dramatic effect had to be effective. Because it all takes place in one location I had to think of creative ways to advance the plot and somehow capture many things in the lives of the characters solely through their exchanges within the restaurant. One of the main ways in which this was done was the one on one conversations between two family members. Sometimes banal and everyday, sometimes intense and emotional, these exchanges from the most ordinary to the most emotional, reveal things about the characters and carry each of their stories forward. The other challenge was structuring the scenes in a way that overall made sense and flowed well. The challenging thing about it was to have transitions that were somewhat smooth and logical, and to have the scenes all fit into a larger structure.

One inspiration for this style of storytelling was the Ang Lee film, *Eat Drink Man Woman*. There are many similarities and things that we borrowed from Lee's film. If you watched both you would notice that they both revolve around a family in which each character develops a separate sub-plot. They also feature a lot of scenes involving eating and a lot of pictures of food. The structure of the two films is very similar, we basically borrowed the storytelling devices from *Eat Drink Man Woman* and changed the plot and the characters. The main difference is that with our film the entire story takes place within the family restaurant.

Most of the structural decisions were made with the paradigm, how can we make this not boring? As such there is a lot of change of pace in the script, slow scenes are followed by fast scenes, emotional scenes are followed by calmer scenes and so on. Within the scenes themselves there are often very turbulent changes of pace in which it seems as though it is going in one direction and the tone, action or mood swings suddenly around. Indeed this became the kind of structural motif or ingredient that resonated throughout the piece at every level of structure from the largest organization, the entire film, to the smallest, an individual scene or shot. The motif that the piece organizes around is the reveal, the playing of a unit of drama along a familiar path with an ending that seems expected only to find at the end, the complete opposite of what was expected. Many of the subplots follow this structure, Alex who is apparently very successful and happy is revealed towards the end to be very conflicted and discontent. Valerie who seems to fall in love is very rudely made aware that her relationship wasn't what she thought it was, and there are examples across the board.

In order to “not be boring”, another structural device was employed which was to have the most interesting point of each child's individual storyline, happen at a different act in the film. Thus the beginning of the film focuses on Alex and his career and marriage, the middle of the film on Valerie and her relationship, and the end on Kyle and the consequences of his rebelliousness. Over the entire film is the relationship between the Father and Mother character which gets progressively more tumultuous as the film develops. The storylines in general get more and more tumultuous and culminate in a dramatic climax when the Father is arrested.

### III. AESTHETICS

We thought a lot about the aesthetics of the film. We planned to shoot in a very realistic almost documentarian style. The overall image quality we tried to make look relatively rough and even a bit grainy at times. This was done for practical reasons, to save time, but also to give a tone of authenticity to the final piece.

The question we thought about when trying to decide on the aesthetics was, why film and why 3D? What in this story has to be told in film that could not be told in say writing or theater? What in this film has to be shot in 3D that couldn't be shot in 2D?

One of the advantages of film over writing is that very little is left up to the imagination. Because with film you are literally seeing what is being told, the natural instinct is to emphasize the visuals. This is one reason why big action films, superhero movies and the like with a big emphasis on special effects tend to do so well; you just don't see that stuff anywhere else. Obviously that was not an option for us at our budget.

Another advantage of film is its ability to capture moments in real time. When recording human to human interaction in literature, quite a lot is lost. While one can do their best to try and capture the rhythm and feel of the conversation through good writing, things like tone, timing and a hundred other body and facial cues are impossible to put down. Film however reproduces with essentially one to one fidelity, the moment to moment, breath to breath interactions between people. This was something we sought to take advantage of as many of the scenes are very nuanced and have a lot of subtle timings that wouldn't be very easily translatable to literature.

We sought to make little, ordinary things, ticks, nervous gestures and the like be as much a part of the film as the dialogue and we tried hard to capture these things.

And another advantage of film that we sought to capitalize on is its ability to capture objects. This was important to our project as we wanted a major portion of the film to focus on food. We took lots of time to film close-ups of various food items, cooking scenes, etc. While one can describe food in literature, seeing it really brings it to the audience in a more full way. While one can have food as props in theater, having the power of the camera to bring the audience into a close-up is something unique to film. This was also part of the documentarian style of the film, as an attempt to take a snapshot of Asian American immigrant family culture in this particular moment in time.

One of the inspirations for the aesthetics of the film came from a Chinese film called *Coming Home*, directed by Zhang Yimou. The film is about a man who was imprisoned by the Communist party of China for 20 years and upon coming home discovers that his wife no longer recognizes him as she suffers from a mental illness. The vast bulk of the film is the man attempting various ways to try and make her recognize him. As you can imagine the story moves along incredibly slowly and there are many tender and intimate scenes where it seems like she can almost remember him but then her disease takes over again. What struck me about this was the film's incredible ability to capture these moments of intense intimacy and drama that would've been so difficult to do as literature. We are drawn moment by moment by every twinge in facial expression and every microscopic movement communicates and expresses painfully the drama of the story.

Another thing that was noteworthy about the film to critics was its meticulous attention to detail with regards to the production design. They noted that the film was produced with incredible fidelity as to the material world of the time. It was a period piece and so the story takes place in the 70's. The producers made sure that even the fabric of the clothing and the buttons on the clothing were authentic from the period. I did not notice these details until watching the film for the second time with my parents who actually lived through the period. They noticed the details that I wasn't able to. In one of the backgrounds there was a film poster. They remembered watching that very film when it first came out in theaters thirty or so years ago!

As Zhang Yimou is a very experienced and mature director having directed films such as *To Live*, *Hero*, *House of Flying Daggers*, etc. I drew a lot of inspiration from him and *Coming Home*, one of his later films, in particular. As such in my film there are a lot of scenes that, dramatically speaking, go one way and then the other and then another. There are many twists and turns and subtleties that put a lot of focus on the acting and the drama. This I think is further enhanced by the 3D of the film which allows the audience to see the character in a fuller sense and relate with them more personally. The 3D also I think helps to enhance the object portion of the film, in which we take many photographs of food; food itself, people eating food, people cooking food, people talking about food, people talking about food while eating food, etc. As I said before photography is able to capture objects and food in a way that text falls short. 3D photography is able to do the same but even more so, to the point of almost being able to taste the food.

#### IV. PURPOSE

Why food? Why all the talk about food? One of the purposes of this film was to document Asian American immigrant culture in a particular moment in history. When thinking about what aspects of culture I wanted to somehow incorporate into the plot, I naturally thought of food. Food is a big part of any culture, Chinese culture in particular. The Chinese are proud of saying that there's is the best cuisine in the world, that the Chinese tongue can distinguish almost twice as many flavors as a Western tongue, and having been on both sides of the equation I can sort of believe it. I wanted this film to be somewhat of a cultural project to in a way preserve a slice of Asian immigrant culture in America. One of my inspirations for taking this angle was the Chinese classic novel, *Red Chamber Dream*. Equivalent in Western literature perhaps to *Les Miserables* or *War and Peace*, *Red Chamber Dream* is an epic, very long novel that tells the story of an aristocratic family living in the waning years of a fictional dynasty in Chinese history. The book is noteworthy for the psychological depth in its character depictions. Like my film it features an ensemble cast of a host of characters. Because it is a novel it goes into much, much greater degree of complexity; main family members, branch family members, servants, and a seemingly never-ending, impossible to memorize stream of uncles, aunts, cousins, grandparents, etc. One thing that makes the book incredibly rich however are many cultural elements that are written into the story and woven throughout the plot. As such the plot often takes a break and we get pages and pages of description of Chinese medicinal practices, architecture, cuisine, recipes, mythology and many, many poems.



While my film is first and foremost a family drama, just as the *Red Chamber Dream* is first and foremost a novel, not a cookbook, I sought to incorporate many non-narrative elements into my film as well. I already talked about one of the elements of Chinese culture that I felt was very important to include and feature, which was food. There are many scenes in which the characters talk about various food items, discuss the cultural contexts in which they are consumed and what they are made of etc. In addition there are also cooking scenes that I plan to interweave into the story when the Father character teaches his youngest son in an effort to bond more with him. I tried to as best as I could give a narrative motivation for the inclusion of these non-narrative portions. Thus when the Father discovers his son has not been performing well in school, he begins teaching him how to cook in a way to spend more father son time together.

Another aspect that I felt was very important was history and politics. This has to do with larger issues of identity and Asian American nationhood in general. These are issues that I struggled with going into college as I had a lot of questions and misconceptions. Does race exist? Why does it matter? Are stereotypes a bad thing? What does being Asian even mean on a personal level? These are questions that I sought to answer during my time in college and I learned a lot. I wanted through this film to share what I had learned to people who may have the same kinds of questions.

I had a lot of misconceptions about Chinese people. I thought Chinese was a very homogenous group when I discovered that there is an incredible diversity, much more than within the United States by certain standards. Linguists estimate that there are about 200 dialects spoken in China, and these are just the ones that are likely to be encountered. It is said that every little village and region has its own little dialect and for the most part these dialects are mutually

unintelligible, that is a Mandarin speaker will think Cantonese sounds no different from any foreign language. With this diversity in language comes a diversity in practices, traditions, etc.

I also thought China was a very backward place, and economically speaking this is true when compared to the West. However in terms of cultural wealth, I discovered the Chinese have a written tradition that is comparable, arguably greater but probably just on the same level as Western literature. There is a philosophical tradition that rivals the West; Confucius, Mencius and Laozi instead of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. There are emperors and dynasties that rival the greatest empires of the West, even the Romans. There are even rich cultural treasures such as the Song and Tang poetry that has perhaps no equivalent in Western literature, poems are of transcendent beauty which the Chinese consider to be of the most precious treasures in their culture's history. Much of this history and tradition is lost on Chinese Americans as they are ignorant of this heritage, seeing only the stereotypical image portrayed in Western media.

While it is impossible to address all of these aspects in this film, and indeed it would probably be unbearable to watch if attempted, I did try to include a sort of condensed version in one dialogue between Kyle and Valerie in which they discuss the state of Asians in America and issues such as stereotypes in the media. Originally I wanted to discuss issues such as affirmative action and minority politics, however as this is a film, media representation just felt more natural. Instead of trying to communicate a sweeping portrait of history, I focused instead on the history that has the most impact, that is contemporary events and how Chinese people and Asians ended up in America in the first place.

In this scene Kyle and Valerie are essentially my mouthpieces as they raise the questions that I had and attempt to answer them. I don't try and provide a definitive answer or draw

summative conclusions, as these issues are multi-layered and very complicated. I do however want to encourage dialogue and raise questions about these issues in the hope that it will point people in the right direction when trying to find answers.

When trying to answer questions such as affirmative action and representation in the media, I recognized that the answers weren't simple and that in order to understand the relationship between Asian Americans and the U.S. government and society, I also had to look into the relationship between Black Americans, Native Americans and Hispanic Americans. I realized that Asian Americans are embedded within a long history of the U.S. government working out relationships between various disenfranchised minority groups. The way that the U.S. treats Asian Americans is directly affected by and in a context how the U.S. has had to deal with and continues to deal with Black Americans, Native Americans and Hispanic Americans. I discovered that racial categories are difficult to define. Some groups that we would consider "white" today such as the Irish, were not considered "white" at one point due to their Catholicism they were simply Irish. Chinese at one point were enough of a minority and had acceptable social practices and skin color to be considered "white" just as any other European immigrant group such as the Germans, Czechs, etc. Only towards the end of the 19th century when competition over the gold rush in California between white and Chinese, did the U.S. implement the Chinese Exclusion Act which placed limits on immigration from China. Upon the implementation of the Chinese Exclusion Act was a wedge driven between Chinese and white Americans.

The Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed in 1943. In the intervening time there were several noteworthy waves of migration from non-Chinese countries. There was a wave of

immigrants from Japan following the collapse of the Japanese economy after World War I. After the repeal there came significant waves of immigration from Korea, Vietnam and China following the Korean War, Vietnam War, Cultural Revolution and Communist Civil War.

Questions of race and identity I realized were not easy to boil down. While understanding historical context is necessary to have clarity on the situation, it is somewhat inaccessible and I did not try and fit most of this content into the movie, rather summarizing an entire historical context in the line delivered by Kyle, “we’re only citizens because the U.S. was kind enough to let us escape from war and communism.” Rather than trying to deliver historical content, I attempted to merely point any viewers who were interested in questions of Asian American identity and politics, in what I feel to be an important area in which there is widespread ignorance, that is historical context.

## **V. THEME AND CONCLUSION**

Thematically the movie is very diverse. The storyline is fivefold, following the five main characters. I hope that any viewer will find at least one character they can relate with, hopefully all of them. I personally feel like I can relate very deeply to each character. As I was the writer, perhaps each character has a piece of me in them.

The film does not come to many easy resolutions. One of the motifs throughout is the fulfillment of an expectation in an exactly opposite way one might expect. I think one of the over-arching themes is perhaps the American dream and each character’s attempt to try and achieve it. The characters each have something they chase and wrestle with their notions of

happiness upon having secured it or having had it deferred. I don't wish however in any way to impose my interpretation of the story onto anyone, I leave that entirely in the hands of the viewer, my only hope that they would watch it and enjoy!

INT. RESTAURANT

FATHER is bustling in the back, MOTHER is setting the table, VALERIE and KYLE are waiting around. Enter ALEX.

FAMILY

Hey! Look who's finally here.

ALEX

Hey guys, it's good to be back.

ALEX greets each one of his siblings and hugs his mom and dad.

FATHER

All right let's sit down.

The family sits down at the dinner table.

FATHER

So how's your job going.

ALEX

It's good, I'm really starting to get into it, the upper level people might be thinking of moving me somewhere. I might get to be a manager even.

FATHER

That's great, proud of you.

ALEX

So what have I missed around here?

MOTHER

Oh plenty.

ALEX

(to Valerie)

How's college going?

VALERIE

It's good.

ALEX

Anything new happen?

VALERIE

I mean you know, getting busy lately. Lots of stuff going on.

ALEX

How about you Kyle?

KYLE

Eh. School's alright.

ALEX

Study hard bro.

KYLE

Yeah alright.

FATHER

You have to study hard so that we can send you off to a good school. Get a good job, then your old man and your mom can retire.

KYLE

Yeah right. You're never going to retire.

FATHER

Not with that attitude. We'll be paying your bills for the rest of our lives!

MOTHER

No, your father doesn't mean that Kyle. One day you'll grow up and be somebody out there.

FATHER

Yeah, make a name for yourself.

KYLE

Yeah sure.

FATHER

Be like your brother Alex. Get a nice job, settle down, start a family.

MOTHER

That goes for you too Valerie. Find a nice boy.

VALERIE

Mom!

MOTHER

Hey I'm just saying.

FATHER

(to Alex)

So how long are you in town for?

ALEX

A couple months. After that I don't know.

FATHER

Well, glad you're back in town. It's been a while huh? Let's make it a good time!

ALEX  
Yeah for sure!

The family raise a glass and toast.

INT. RESTAURANT

Father is counting out change to a customer, doing other restaurant-related tasks.

FATHER  
That'll be 11.69. Here is your  
change.

Enter ALEX.

ALEX  
Hey dad how's it going.

FATHER  
It's good.

FATHER turns to deal with another customer. ALEX waits for the exchange to finish.

ALEX  
Hey there's something I wanted to  
talk to you about.

Enter KYLE.

FATHER  
Hey Kyle, you're late.

KYLE  
Yeah I got stuck in traffic.

FATHER  
You ride a bicycle.

KYLE walks to the front of the kitchen where VALERIE exits from. VALERIE's shift is over and gives KYLE her apron.

VALERIE  
Bye.

KYLE puts on the apron.

FATHER  
(to Alex)  
You what?!

ALEX laughs and grins from ear to ear.

FATHER  
Who have you told? Have you told  
your mother?

Enter MOTHER. Clearly in a state of excitement.



MOTHER

Can you believe it, can you believe it, can you believe it?

FATHER

How long has it been?

ALEX

I proposed a few weeks ago but I haven't told anyone besides you and mom and a couple friends.

FATHER

Oh my God. You're going to be married. Can we talk about this in the kitchen?

ALEX

Sure uh sorry I actually have to head out.

FATHER

All right well good bye.

MOTHER and FATHER enter the kitchen.

FATHER

He told you before he told me?

MOTHER

He told me a long time ago.

FATHER

And you didn't say anything?

MOTHER

I think he wanted to tell you himself.

KYLE walks by.

KYLE

Hey guys what's going on?

FATHER

Nothing, nothing. You'll find out later.

FATHER and MOTHER look at each other with excitement over the news.

INT. RESTAURANT

Father and Mother are seated at a table quietly having a talk.

FATHER

So Alex is back.

MOTHER

It's so nice to have the whole family together again. I can't remember the last time we've been like this.

FATHER

Yeah, it's been a while.

MOTHER

And he's getting married.

FATHER

It's crazy.

MOTHER

I'm worried about Valerie.

FATHER

Why did something happen?

MOTHER

She's been giving me the cold shoulder lately.

FATHER

I haven't seen anything like that.

MOTHER

Well yeah it's just between her and me.

FATHER

Do you know what could be wrong?

MOTHER

I have a hunch.

FATHER

You know Kyle, his grades are just not up to scratch.

MOTHER

I don't understand it.

FATHER

If he just tried he would be the top of his class.

MOTHER

Definitely.

FATHER

Why is he at the bottom? Not even dumb kids get grades like these.

MOTHER

It just doesn't make any sense. How are we doing for the restaurant?

FATHER

It's going well, ever since we moved to this location.

MOTHER

Yeah, it's making a big difference.

FATHER

Each week we've been pulling in more and more. This is great we might actually get to retire early.

MOTHER

So we're doing okay.

FATHER

Yeah I think so. Pretty soon Kyle is going to head out to college. Valerie is going to graduate soon.

MOTHER

Do you think she'll be alright?

FATHER

Yeah, I think you're just making too big a deal out of things.

MOTHER

Okay. It's crazy I can't believe our kids are getting married.

FATHER

Yeah. I think we did alright.

MOTHER

I think so.

FATHER

Do you want to clean up?

MOTHER

Okay.

The two of them busy themselves closing the restaurant.

INT. RESTAURANT

Alex comes in with several of his co-workers. They are seated at the table and order many dishes. Alex explains the cultural background behind each of the dishes to his co-workers.

MOTHER

What is this?

ALEX

Hey Mom, I wanted to bring some of my friends in, show them this place.

BRIAN JOSH & KEVIN  
Hi, hello, how are you.

MOTHER  
Oh so how do you guys know each other?

ALEX  
We're co-workers.

Kevin, Brian and Josh nod.

MOTHER  
Oh so these are your co-workers!  
Well, pull up a table, let's eat!  
What would you guys like?

ALEX  
How about you surprise us, give us the best you got.

Mother comes out with several dishes.

MOTHER  
Here you go, some BBQ Pork Buns.

Hands them a plate of BBQ Pork Buns.

ALEX  
Oh these are really good, they're called cha shao bao.

BRIAN  
What is it? Is it just bread?

ALEX  
No they have BBQ Pork on the inside. They're steamed buns.

JOSH  
Wow these are really good.

MOTHER  
And here are some fried shrimp balls.

Hands them a plate of fried shrimp balls.

KEVIN  
Shrimp balls?

ALEX  
Yeah it's just a ball of shrimp. And then you fry it.

BRIAN  
That sounds awesome.

ALEX  
Yeah just try it.

MOTHER  
Here's some turnip cake.

Hands them a plate of turnip cake.

ALEX  
These are good, they're just fried  
turnips in cakes.

BRIAN  
Hey it tastes like hash browns kind  
of.

ALEX  
Yeah I used to really like them  
growing up.

JOSH  
What about now?

ALEX  
I still like them.

MOTHER  
Here's some Chinese broccoli.

Hands them a plate of Chinese broccoli.

ALEX  
Oh these are really good too.

KEVIN  
What's that sauce on the top?

ALEX  
It's oyster sauce.

BRIAN  
Oh it's really salty.

ALEX  
It goes well because the broccoli  
is kind of bitter.

MOTHER  
Are you guys ready for desert? Try  
some sesame balls.

Hands them a plate of sesame balls.

KEVIN  
Wow what are these?

ALEX  
They're like fried sesame balls.

BRIAN  
What's the stuff inside?

ALEX  
Red bean paste.

JOSH  
Red bean?

ALEX  
Yeah it's like a sweet bean. People  
call it Chinese chocolate.

Scene continues in this way for a while.

INT. RESTAURANT

FATHER and KYLE are standing around, FATHER approaches KYLE.

FATHER  
Your grades aren't looking too  
good.

KYLE  
Yeah Dad I know.

FATHER  
Look I'm not going to stand over  
your shoulder and watch everything  
that you do. You've got to get  
these grades up.

KYLE  
I'll do better, don't worry.

FATHER  
I am worried, you're applying for  
colleges. With these grades I'm not  
sure if you can get into college.

KYLE  
Give me a break.

FATHER  
Look, you're smart enough to get  
the best grade in the class. It's  
time to grow up, take some  
responsibility.

KYLE  
Yeah, okay I said I'll do better.

FATHER  
How about you try harder.

KYLE  
Yeah, okay I'll try harder.

FATHER  
Is that a promise?

KYLE  
Yes.

YOUNGER SON's friends come in DAVID and TONY.

DAVID  
Hey what's up Kyle.

KYLE  
Hey guys what's up.

DAVID  
Nothing, we just wanna see how  
you're doing.

KYLE  
I'm doing fine. Hey how about we  
talk over there.

KYLE points to a corner of the restaurant away from the  
guests.

DAVID  
Hey you gotta get with us, we've  
been hitting up all the houses in  
this neighborhood man.

TONY  
(Counts on his fingers)  
Jewelry, watches, cash

DAVID  
These rich folk don't know nothing.  
We can just walk right in most of  
the time, walk right out.

KYLE  
Guys are you crazy? I'm not going  
to go breaking and entering houses  
in this neighborhood when my dad  
owns a restaurant in it.

DAVID  
No man, it's so easy, it's like  
free money.

KYLE  
That's crazy, what if they just  
walk in on you.

DAVID  
That's why we bring this

DAVID pulls out a gun.

KYLE

Put that away man! Are you insane?

DAVID

No man, you don't actually use it,  
you just pull it out and run away.  
Scare them y'know?

KYLE

Guys I gotta get back to work.  
Count me out on this whole burglary  
thing.

DAVID

Whatever.

KYLE returns to the restaurant.

FATHER

So get your grades up. Understand?

KYLE

Yeah, yeah.

INT. RESTAURANT

Enter Valerie. She places an order and sits down. Kyle is  
working and sits down with her.

KYLE

I didn't know you had a shift  
today.

VALERIE

I don't I'm just stopping by.

KYLE

You know dad has been riding me all  
week. He's been treating me like  
I'm his slave or something.

VALERIE

Quit whining, he treats us all the  
same.

KYLE

Nuh uh. I'm telling you. What about  
John? He never does anything to  
him. He never made Alex work. I'm  
telling you he has it out for me.

VALERIE

You're just being over-dramatic.

KYLE

Yeah right just cause he treats you  
like the sweet little girl you act  
like in front of him you think we  
all get to be as lucky as you.



VALERIE

Shut up Kyle. (to the waiter) Could I get a to go box?

INT. RESTAURANT

Valerie is working at the restaurant.

VALERIE

What would you like to eat?

SAM

Valerie?

VALERIE

Oh hi, it's Sam right?

SAM

Yeah.

VALERIE

We had micro-biology together?

SAM

Yeah that's right. Wow I didn't know you worked here.

VALERIE

Yeah, my dad owns the restaurant.

SAM

Oh wow. Yeah I was in a hurry I don't normally come here but I had to get something quick. What's good to eat here?

VALERIE

Um you should try the Barbecue Pork, people say it's really good.

SAM

What do you think?

VALERIE

(laughs)

I've had it growing up my whole life I think I have a different opinion about it.

SAM

Sure, one barbecue pork.

Sam finishes eating. Valerie collects his plates.

SAM

Oh you were right that was really good.

VALERIE

I told you.

SAM

Hey who are you taking physical chemistry with?

VALERIE

This semester with McNeil.

SAM

How are you doing?

VALERIE

Oh I'm doing so badly that class is so hard. Who do you have?

SAM

I have Boulder.

VALERIE

Is he hard?

SAM

Hard. Really hard.

VALERIE

I feel like I can't keep up in this class.

SAM

Me neither. Do you want to study together later?

VALERIE

Um. Sure. When?

SAM

When do you get off?

VALERIE

I'm working until evening. I get off at 6 or 6:30.

SAM

Do you want to meet at the natural sciences library at like around 8?

VALERIE

Sure that sounds good.

INT. RESTAURANT

KYLE enters restaurant. ALEX enters shortly after.

ALEX

Hey, long shift?

KYLE

Yeah. Typical Friday dinner rush.  
You just get off work?

ALEX

Yeah.

KYLE

You have to work this late?

ALEX

We had a lot of extra meetings.  
Then I got stuck in traffic.

KYLE

Do you want some noodles?

ALEX

Sure.

KYLE and ALEX eat.

ALEX

How was school?

KYLE

It was good.

ALEX

Are you staying out of trouble?

KYLE

Y-Yeah.

ALEX

Studying hard?

KYLE

I don't know mom, you tell me.

ALEX

Hey you gotta work hard so it'll  
pay off later. It also pay off if  
you're lazy and get bad grades.

KYLE

Yeah, yeah OK.

The two of them continue eating

KYLE

Hey Dad got us this.

Takes out moon cake and gives it to ALEX. ALEX appreciates  
it

ALEX

Wow, when's the last time you've  
had a moon cake?

KYLE

Uhh, last year?

ALEX

Oh that's right. Man it feels like I've been gone forever.

KYLE

Welcome back.

They divide the moon cake and eat it.

ALEX

How is Valerie doing?

KYLE

She's doing okay. Fights a lot with Mom.

ALEX

She didn't use to do that.

KYLE

Nope. I guess hormones.

ALEX

What?? She's about to finish college.

KYLE

So? If anything she's getting more and more crazy.

ALEX

(Holds up the mooncake)

What are these supposed to symbolize again?

KYLE

Well it has to do with the Mid-Autumn Festival. Zhong Qiu Jie I mean that's when we eat them.

ALEX

Isn't there like some story?

KYLE

Yeah I think that goddess? Chang E or something.

ALEX

Oh yeah who shot down the...

KYLE

The ten suns, and left one behind.

ALEX

And then she got the immortality  
potion.

KYLE

No it was her husband who shot down  
the nine suns and didn't want to  
become immortal because he wouldn't  
be able to be with her.

ALEX

Right so she drank it.

KYLE

She drank it and flew to the moon  
and became the moon goddess.

ALEX

Isn't it also just celebrating the  
harvest?

KYLE

Well I mean yeah. It's like Chinese  
Thanksgiving.

ALEX

I guess this year we'll just be  
celebrating the fact that I came  
home.

KYLE

Yeah right.

INT. RESTAURANT

Valerie and Mother are sharing a meal.

MOTHER

So how's it been going lately?

VALERIE

Good, nothing new.

MOTHER

Are you doing okay in your classes

VALERIE

Yes mom I'm fine.

MOTHER

Now do you remember what w-

VALERIE

Mom, I don't want to talk about it.

MOTHER

I'm just saying you have to be  
careful.

VALERIE

Mom.

MOTHER

What kind of boys you talk to.

VALERIE

Mom!

MOTHER

And what kind of girls you talk to too!

VALERIE

Mom can we please not talk about this.

MOTHER

Who else is going to tell you these things. You need to find someone who is responsible,

VALERIE

Mom, please.

MOTHER

Someone who can take care of you,

VALERIE

I can take care of myself mom.

MOTHER

It's not about whether or not you can take care of yourself, it's about the person that you're going to share, you know, your life with.

VALERIE

Yes, I get it, okay, can we please stop talking about this.

MOTHER

And then you can settle down and start a nice family.

VALERIE

Mom! Seriously I'm leaving.

Valerie gets up and leaves.

INT. RESTAURANT

Valerie and Sam sneak into restaurant long past closing hours.

VALERIE

Hey, this way.

Sam follows Valerie into the kitchen area.

VALERIE

I used to spend a lot of time in my dad's kitchen growing up.

The two of them wander around the kitchen, admiring the various stations and utensils.

VALERIE

When my mom and dad were both working, and they were too busy to watch us kids, they would sometimes just leave us here. And we would run around the restaurant, but mainly we would just stay around here, in the kitchen. And all the cooks would tease me. And my dad would let me have bits of what he was cooking. Alex was always a little bit too much older, so it was mostly just me and Kyle, playing around with the pots. Back then we used to get along a lot better than we do now. I had a lot of good memories here.

Valerie gets some ingredients.

VALERIE

Hey are you hungry?

She starts cooking.

VALERIE

I don't really cook that often. My dad always says I never got any of his talent, but that isn't true. I actually cook pretty well, I just never really try when I'm in front of him. I think he doesn't really want me to go into the food business. I actually enjoy it though, I wouldn't really mind working in the restaurant full time after college, but I don't think that's what he wants for me you know? I think he always wanted me to do something more.

Valerie finishes cooking and sets the table for her and Sam. They begin eating.

VALERIE

So? How is it?

SAM

It's delicious.

VALERIE  
(smiles)  
Really?

SAM  
Yeah, I like it a lot.

VALERIE  
Are you saying that because you  
really like it, or just because I  
was the one cooking it?

SAM  
I like it, because of both.

Valerie takes her chopsticks and takes some of Sam's food from his plate and leans in to feed him. Sam is hesitant at first but leans in and eats from her chopsticks. The scene ends Valerie feeding Sam.

INT. RESTAURANT

Valerie is working at the restaurant. She begins serving a customer, Sarah at a table.

VALERIE  
Hi what would you like to drink?

SARAH  
Just water.

VALERIE  
All right, are you ready to order?

SARAH  
Sure, I'll have the Cha Siu Rou  
with Fried rice please?

VALERIE  
All right sounds good.

SARAH  
Hey do you go to school around  
here?

VALERIE  
Yeah, are you also a student?

SARAH  
Yeah, but I go to school out of  
state. But I'm from here so I know  
a lot of people. Do you know Sam?

VALERIE  
Yeah I do.



SARAH

He was the one who actually recommended this place to me. He was like, it's so good you have to try it.

VALERIE

Oh I see.

SARAH

Yeah I don't usually eat at these kinds of places, but thanks to Sam.

VALERIE

How do you know each other.

SARAH

Oh I've known Sam since forever. We grew together, we've known each other since childhood. So yeah we're like really close.

VALERIE

Oh I see.

SARAH

He mentioned you the other day. You're his, study partner?

VALERIE

Mmhmm.

The conversation comes to an awkward pause.

SARAH

Could I get some water?

VALERIE

Sure I'll get that for you.

INT. RESTAURANT

Alex and his mother are sitting at a table discussing over a meal.

ALEX

It just seems like a ton of work.

MOTHER

Well of course, what did you think it would be like?

ALEX

I don't know, not like this.

MOTHER

It's just life, everything takes time, everything takes a lot of preparation.

ALEX

So I have to book hotels for the guests?

MOTHER

Yes but don't worry about paying for them.

ALEX

So do I just book like a floor?

MOTHER

No you need to find a couple of places. Your college friends might be okay at cheaper places but grandma and grandpa are going to need something a little nicer.

ALEX

Okay I didn't think about that. So photographer, videographer,

MOTHER

Hairdresser, make-up, you need to pick out a cake, a dress, flowers

ALEX

I think those things, Sandra is taking care of.

MOTHER

Well then you need to think about the venue, like do they cater? Are you going to have to get catering from somewhere? What about the entertainment? Is there going to be music? Or a performance? And your honeymoon.

ALEX

Whoa, when did we get to honeymoon. Let's talk about planning the wedding and then we can plan the honeymoon.

MOTHER

I think you should focus on the guest list first.

ALEX

Okay.

MOTHER

You should start that as soon as you can. The last thing you want to do is forget to invite somebody.

ALEX

Right.

MOTHER

That can have consequences that last for years.

ALEX

Good point.

MOTHER

People want to be there. In the end they won't remember so much the flowers as they will the people that were there.

ALEX

Okay I'll do that.

MOTHER

That's my little boy.

ALEX

Mom, come on.

MOTHER

I'm sorry I just can't believe it. You know us parents, you'll understand one day, it feels like yesterday that you were this tall, and I could just pick you up and kiss you and hold you.

ALEX

(sighs)

Mom, come on.

MOTHER

And now you're all grown up. You're a big man and you have a job and you're taking care of yourself and you're about to get married, I just believe it.

ALEX

Me neither.

MOTHER

I just remember the time you talk your first steps. And how you would always pick up things that had fallen on the floor and put them back on the table. Even pieces of rice, and toothpicks. You could barely even reach the top of the table but you would try, it was so cute.

ALEX

Okay mom.

MOTHER

You were such a perfect baby, never cried, you never gave us a hard time. You were always so well behaved we didn't have to do anything. Now you're going to be somebody's husband. And have kids!

ALEX

Hey let's not get ahead of ourselves.

MOTHER

And I'll have grandkids!

ALEX

Okay mom, I think I have to go.

MOTHER

OK. Guest list.

ALEX

Yup.

INT. RESTAURANT

Alex enters restaurant. Valerie is working.

ALEX

Hey how's it going?

VALERIE

Good, what are you doing here?

ALEX

I got off late, felt like stopping by. Have you been busy?

VALERIE

Nope, slow day.

ALEX

Yeah I figured. It's usually slow on Tuesday nights?

VALERIE

Yeah usually.

Alex takes a seat.

ALEX

So, what do you recommend?

VALERIE

How about some beef noodle soup?

ALEX

Sounds good.

Valerie without any other customers to serve, gives Alex his food and takes a seat with him.

ALEX

So how are things?

VALERIE

Things are complicated.

ALEX

What do you mean?

VALERIE

I just wish that things were the way that they were supposed to be.

ALEX

What do you mean by that?

VALERIE

Like if you order a beef noodle soup and they give pork noodle soup instead.

ALEX

You're not making sense.

VALERIE

So there was this boy, I really liked him. He was nice and charming and I really liked him.

ALEX

Okay.

VALERIE

And I thought, I really thought that he you know, felt the same way about me.

ALEX

Right.

VALERIE

But he didn't.

ALEX

(sighs)

That's tough.

VALERIE

Why does life have to be so hard?

ALEX

Hey it won't be that bad.

VALERIE

I can't focus, on school work on work work on anything.

ALEX

Hey you'll be okay. This is all a part of growing up.

VALERIE

What do you mean a part of growing up? Does growing up mean breaking your heart over and over again until you finally give up and find someone who you think you can settle with?

ALEX

Whoa whoa, what's with all the pessimism.

VALERIE

What else is there? Why even get married? What's the point, half of them are going to end up in divorce anyway.

ALEX

Yeah.

VALERIE

I mean you have it all figured out right?

ALEX

Me, no. I may be older but I'm still figuring things out just like you.

VALERIE

So what's the point of getting married?

ALEX

I don't know, you just do it cause like, that's what you're supposed to do and that's what everyone does.

VALERIE

Couldn't you just not get married? You could just be with them and not go through all the hassle. That way if it doesn't work out it's not such a big deal you know? Why go through the trouble and have a big ceremony and stuff if you're not even sure about it. Aren't you just setting yourself up?

ALEX

Uh I don't know. I haven't really thought about that.

VALERIE

I mean, that doesn't sound good to me either. But like I just don't understand, how do people get together you know? And just make it work?

ALEX

You know, you just have to find the right person, then it will all work out. As long as they're okay with you and you're okay with them, it'll all work itself out in the end. I mean look mom and dad.

VALERIE

I guess. I think I'm just a little bit worked up.

ALEX

I mean you just need to find the right person and then it'll be okay.

VALERIE

Yeah, thanks for hearing me out.

ALEX

Sure. Is there anything else you can do? You know, make yourself occupied.

VALERIE

Yeah I was thinking of getting more involved in some student organizations and clubs.

ALEX

That's good. Keep your mind off that boy. You can just focus on being productive.

VALERIE

Yeah that sounds good.

ALEX

All right, see you.

VALERIE

Bye.

INT. RESTAURANT

Father and Kyle are sitting at a table.

FATHER

So tell me what's been going on.

KYLE  
I didn't get into any colleges.

FATHER  
(nods)

KYLE  
I've skipped a few classes.

FATHER  
(nods)

KYLE  
I haven't been going to school for  
a long time.

FATHER  
(shakes his head)

INT. RESTAURANT

Father and Kyle are in the kitchen. Father is teaching Kyle  
how to cook.

FATHER  
So the first thing you need to do  
is wash the vegetables.

Father shows Kyle how to wash the vegetables.

KYLE  
How do I know when it's clean  
enough?

FATHER  
You'll just know after a while. So  
we have to chop everything.

Father shows Kyle how to chop vegetables.

FATHER  
No not like that. If you keep your  
fingers out like that, you're going  
to end up cutting yourself. Hold  
your hand like this, keep the blade  
right up on your knuckles. If you  
cut like this, you'll never cut  
yourself. You can control the knife  
and cut exactly the width that you  
want.

KYLE  
This is hard, can't I just cut it  
the way that I was doing?



FATHER

Trust me this is the better way. It won't be easy at first but just stick to it and once the hang of it, it'll be second nature.

Father gets out some meat.

FATHER

See this meat? It's been marinating, you'll have to do that beforehand, but we'll just start with it like this.

KYLE

What are we making?

FATHER

Mapo Tofu. This is how you do it.

Scene progresses in the style of a cooking tutorial

FATHER

First thing is you've got to shock the tofu. Put it in some warm water for 15 minutes with salt. Next we'll fry the meat. Put a pinch of garlic in the pan with some oil. When it turns brown add in the grown meat. Wait until the meat is cooked then add chili pepper, black bean sauce, Sichuan peppercorn. Stir those in. After that add cooking wine, sesame oil, soy sauce, beef broth and salt. Add the tofu and boil for 3-5 minutes. Add some cornstarch and top off with fresh green onion.

Scene continues and covers several Chinese dishes and how to cook them.

INT. RESTAURANT

MOTHER

Hey honey did you see this?

Mother shows husband several official documents. He looks through them and grows noticeably alarmed.

FATHER

When did these come in.

MOTHER

A few days ago, I didn't notice them until today.

FATHER

Oh this is not good. How did this happen?

MOTHER

I don't know.

FATHER

I bet it was that one guy that got mad at our service the other day. He looked like he was going to report us or something. How did we get reported? This is crazy, this has never happened before.

MOTHER

Will things be okay?

FATHER

I don't know but this is bad. We could get jail time and fines for this.

MOTHER

What exactly is going on?

FATHER

Our workers are not legal. We hire them so we don't have to pay minumum wage.

MOTHER

What? Why would we do that.

FATHER

It's what we've always done. Nobody noticed until we moved locations, people in this neighborhood probably pay more attention to that kind of stuff.

MOTHER

So what's going to happen?

FATHER

We have a court date, we'll have to go to that. And we'll probably have to pay some fines. We'll definitely have to release those workers. Hopefully we won't have to go to jail.

MOTHER

Go to jail?

FATHER

It's possible. We might have to shut down.

MOTHER

Oh no.

FATHER

Dammit. How did this happen?

MOTHER

Well why were you using illegal immigrant labor?

FATHER

That's just the way we've always done things.

MOTHER

Well you didn't think about, oh I don't, breaking the law? And how that might be a bad thing? You know that we didn't pass the health inspection a couple years ago. Do you remember when they almost shut us down because of that?

FATHER

Hey, okay it wasn't like that. Nobody could have seen this coming.

MOTHER

This won't go well. You know your record. All those things you did when you were young.

FATHER

Hey that was a long time ago. That stuff shouldn't come up.

MOTHER

You remember when you used to cheat and steal? You have a criminal record, this isn't going to go lightly, there's a lot of stuff they could use against you.

FATHER

That's not going to happen. This has nothing to do with any of that. That was years ago.

MOTHER

You think that stuff just disappears? You have to own up to it sooner or later, this is just like those other times.

FATHER

Hey I paid for what I did. That's in the past, this has nothing to do with that.

MOTHER

It won't go away. If they see all this stuff on your criminal record and then they see our restaurant failing health records, poisoning people, and then using illegal labor for less than minimum wage, don't you think there will be some consequences?

FATHER

Hey! Just calm down. We'll get through this. It'll all be okay.

MOTHER

How can you say that?

FATHER

Don't worry, nothing will come of this.

MOTHER

This is not good.

FATHER

No it's not.

MOTHER

What are we going to do.

FATHER

We're going to hope, and do what we can.

INT. RESTAURANT

FATHER and ALEX are sitting at a table.

FATHER

So how are things in your life.

ALEX

They've been good.

FATHER

How's the wedding planning going?

ALEX

Not bad, mom's been really helpful.

FATHER

That's good, she's good with that stuff.

ALEX

Yeah.

FATHER

It's a big day, you ready?

ALEX

Yeah, yeah I think so.

FATHER

Hey you've got to work hard and persevere. Just cause it doesn't look like things are going right, doesn't mean that you can stop trying. That how it works with marriage, you just got to keep pulling through.

ALEX

Okay Dad.

FATHER

Take me and your mom. Are we perfect? No. Do we fight a lot? Well, sometimes. But marriage is above that. You've got to value your relationship and that other person more than just yourself. And when you start a family you've got to put that first too. You know what I mean? Sacrifice for the good of the family.

ALEX

Yup. Uh-huh.

FATHER

When we first came here it was hard. I didn't get into a good school. I couldn't find a good job, it was hard to make ends meet you know?

ALEX

Yeah I get it.

FATHER

But you and your brother, have been given so much. I'm just worried for him you know? Can you please keep him on track, he won't listen to me.

ALEX

I'll try Dad.

INT. RESTAURANT

Alex catches Kyle during break time. Stops by for a chat.

ALEX

How's it been going?

KYLE

Good, you know same old.

ALEX  
Has school been okay?

KYLE  
Not really, I mean haven't you heard?

ALEX  
That you've been skipping classes?

KYLE  
Yeah I haven't been to school in a long time. Every college has rejected me.

ALEX  
Yeah, I heard.

KYLE  
What else is new.

ALEX  
Hey bro, this isn't the end. You just got to work your way out of this, get your life together.

KYLE  
(groans)  
You too? Man dad was bad enough. Now I got two dads.

ALEX  
Hey what are you talking about?

KYLE  
Could you guys just back off? Give me some space?

ALEX  
Hey it's not like we're trying to hurt you or anything.

KYLE  
I know what I'm doing okay.

ALEX  
Is that what you call knowing what you're doing? Dropping out of school and getting rejected from every college?

KYLE  
Hey I don't want to talk about it.

Turns around and goes back to work.

INT. RESTAURANT

Valerie and Alex are sharing a meal.

VALERIE

So what did he do?

ALEX

I don't know, I was just trying to talk to him and then, the next thing I knew it was like I was his like enemy or something.

VALERIE

I don't know what's going with him.

ALEX

Has he been like this before?

VALERIE

I mean, no. We all thought he was doing okay.

ALEX

And then he dropped out?

VALERIE

Well he stopped going to class.

ALEX

Man.

VALERIE

He would apparently get dropped off and then just walk back home and play video games.

ALEX

That's so crazy. I wouldn't have even imagined doing that when I was in school. Where did he get that from?

VALERIE

I don't know. I guess I wasn't being the best older sister. I didn't really pay attention to him, I just thought Kyle was being Kyle. It didn't really hit me until I got the news, that there was something going on the whole time.

ALEX

So you didn't notice anything?

VALERIE

I mean, I notice things now that I look back. He was growing more distant, more of just like, I don't care about anything attitude. I didn't think about it, I just kind of didn't pay attention to him.

ALEX

Yeah I guess I could've done better on my part too.

VALERIE

That's different, you're living far away, there's only so much you can do.

ALEX

Yeah but I never called, not even once, every time I called I would talk mainly with mom, a little with dad, I didn't even ask about him most of the time.

VALERIE

Well, you were really busy right?

ALEX

Yeah but it doesn't seem like it matters that much anymore.

VALERIE

What do you mean?

ALEX

I mean, or did I tell you? I got promoted. They're moving me west, I'm going to be a branch manager.

VALERIE

Wow, that's great! Congratulations!

ALEX

Thanks, thanks.

VALERIE

Wait so what did you mean?

ALEX

Yeah, I mean it's great and all, but I don't know, it just feels kind of mixed feelings you know?

VALERIE

No I don't, it sounds like really great news.

ALEX

Yeah it was, it really was at first. But as I went on with my day I was just like, now what. I'm just going to be the manager instead of the lower level guy. Instead of the guy instruction I'll just be the guy giving instruction. It's not like I'm actually going to be doing  
(MORE)



ALEX (cont'd)  
different stuff. And I'll still  
have a boss who gives me  
instruction and he has a boss and  
he has a boss.

VALERIE  
Yeah but, it's great, you're moving  
up people are respecting you now.

ALEX  
Yeah that's true. But today  
something weird happened. I was  
working with my co-workers, and we  
were all really tight you know? But  
as I was working with them today I  
was just like, I'm not going to be  
with these guys for very much  
longer, you know, I'm getting  
promoted and re-located. It was  
weird I felt like I just stopped,  
caring about them. Like they  
weren't my friends anymore. They  
were just my co-workers. And then  
pretty soon they won't even be  
that, cause I'll be moved out.  
Managers can't really be friends  
with their team you know? So yeah  
I'm moving up and that's good, but  
it's also, like I don't know, more  
lonely?

VALERIE  
Yeah, that sucks. I guess that's  
just how these things work.

ALEX  
We used to just be able to talk  
about anything, but I mean when the  
news came out, they felt it, I felt  
it, there was just this wall all of  
a sudden that wasn't there before.  
I felt like I couldn't really just  
be myself with them anymore, you  
know?

VALERIE  
Yeah I'm sorry. I guess  
congratulations anyway.

ALEX  
Yeah congratulations to me.

VALERIE  
Hey cheer up, pretty soon you'll be  
married and she'll be all you need.

ALEX  
Yeah.

VALERIE

Right?

ALEX

I'm starting to re-think this marriage thing.

VALERIE

What?!

ALEX

I mean not like entirely, I'm just having some doubts.

VALERIE

Some doubts?

ALEX

You know marriage is like a really important thing you know? I'm going to be with Sandra for the rest of my life. It's a big commitment.

VALERIE

Well yeah, that's kind of the point.

ALEX

I was just thinking about, you know our life together. I was just wondering if we're really the right person for each other. I'm just not sure we're right for each other.

VALERIE

Well haven't you had a lot of time to think about that and figure that stuff out? Why did you say yes?

ALEX

I just. You know it just seemed right at the time.

VALERIE

Haven't you guys been together for like ever?

ALEX

Six years.

VALERIE

Shouldn't you have gotten to figure this out by now?

ALEX

I mean we've been together for six years, getting married was her idea and before I knew it I was making

(MORE)

ALEX (cont'd)  
wedding plans and picking out our  
cake. It feels a little bit like, I  
was just going along with it, but  
now it kind of feels more real, and  
I don't know if I'm so sure about  
it anymore.

VALERIE  
Alex, what are you saying.

ALEX  
I don't even know. It just feels  
like, like I have the perfect  
career and the perfect wedding  
lined up. Why doesn't it feel like  
the way I thought it would?

VALERIE  
At least you haven't gotten your  
heart broken.

ALEX  
Are you still thinking about that  
boy? Come on Val.

VALERIE  
Not him.

ALEX  
Good.

VALERIE  
But there have been others.

ALEX  
What!? Valerie!

VALERIE  
I don't know, my life's a mess.

ALEX  
Hey join the club.

INT. RESTAURANT

Valerie and Kyle are eating together.

VALERIE  
So how have you been?

KYLE  
Good.

VALERIE  
I heard about your classes and  
college.

KYLE

Yeah, yeah old news.

VALERIE

How has it been, are you okay?

KYLE

I'm OK.

VALERIE

Okay. You know Kyle you should've really tried harder in school.

KYLE

Oh boy.

VALERIE

I'm not saying that to try and be mean to you, I really think you were the one out of all of us who really was going to succeed.

KYLE

Yeah right, be more successful than Alex? That's not where I'm headed.

VALERIE

But you could, you could turn yourself around.

KYLE

Oh yeah, could you please show me how? Maybe you could start by telling me about your last relationship.

VALERIE

Kyle that's not funny.

KYLE

Okay, okay I'm sorry.

VALERIE

I've been getting involved in the community.

KYLE

Like that Asian thing you go to?

VALERIE

It's a community center.

KYLE

What do you even do?

VALERIE

We do a lot. There's actually a lot of issues in the Asian American

(MORE)

VALERIE (cont'd)  
community. You know like  
stereotyping? Or not getting equal  
opportunity.

KYLE  
So you're upset that not all Asians  
get to be a doctor or a lawyer? Or  
is that a stereotype.

VALERIE  
Kyle, you wouldn't understand. It's  
called symbolic annihilation. We're  
never represented in the media, or  
in society. It's like we don't  
exist. And we are it's usually as a  
stereotype.

KYLE  
So what? It's not like it's our  
right to be represented by the  
media. This isn't our country.

VALERIE  
Yes it is, we are citizens.

KYLE  
Only because America let us be  
citizens. It's not like we deserve  
to be Americans. The only reason we  
have any citizenship was because  
the American government was nice  
enough to let us escape from war  
and communism.

VALERIE  
Well we still need to try and push  
for equality.

KYLE  
There is no equality, there's just  
the people who can tell other  
people what they are in life and  
the scrubs at the bottom who just  
have to accept it. That's reality.

VALERIE  
That's not what America was based  
on. America was based on the idea  
that all men are created equal.

KYLE  
Yeah and when has that ever been  
true. Thomas Jefferson wrote that  
and then went home and bossed his  
slaves around.

VALERIE

Yeah but shouldn't we try to correct that over time?

KYLE

Yeah right, we're not even really American, we're definitely not Chinese, we're just scrubs who get bossed around by him.

VALERIE

You mean dad?

KYLE

Yeah, that's our country, the United States of Dad and he's king, emperor and president for life.

VALERIE

Kyle that's not true.

KYLE

Yeah? Why don't you tell him to get off my back for once.

VALERIE

Kyle that's not what he's trying to do.

KYLE

He's been working me like a slave. I can't take it anymore, he's been making me work like crazy and all the bad jobs, cleaning the frier, cleaning the toilets, it's driving me insane. Everything I do is wrong to him. I get chewed out for putting the plunger on the wrong side of the toilet. I get chewed out for putting the onions on top of the celery instead of under the celery. I get chewed out for eating. I get chewed out for not eating.

VALERIE

He's trying to do what's best for you.

KYLE

How is that what's best for me?

VALERIE

Just try to see things from his perspective.

KYLE

I'll make my son work like sweatshop laborer.

VALERIE

That's not what he means by it.

KYLE

Well that's what it feels like.

VALERIE

Kyle just try and be sympathetic.

KYLE

I'm trying.

VALERIE

Do you want me to tell him to go easier on you?

KYLE

Don't even bother, you know how he is.

VALERIE

Alright. Just try and do better in school, hopefully you can resolve this and get into college.

KYLE

Yeah, thanks.

INT. RESTAURANT

Father and Mother are in the restaurant alone. Mother brings in some envelopes.

MOTHER

Alright we'll see how it goes.

They open the envelope and read it over. Father grows agitated and flips through the pages.

FATHER

Oh my God.

MOTHER

What?

FATHER

I can't believe this is happening.

MOTHER

What? What's going on?

FATHER

The court date, the fines, it's all being rescinded.

MOTHER

Rescinded?

FATHER

We don't have to appear in court!  
We don't have to pay any fines!

MOTHER

What?! How?

FATHER

I don't know! I don't know!

The two of them begin celebrating. Father gets more and more carried away. Mother stops.

FATHER

Hey, what's wrong?

MOTHER

Nothing.

FATHER

Hey this is great news what's wrong?

MOTHER

Nothing it's nothing.

She walks away toward the other side of the restaurant.

FATHER

Hey what's going on?

MOTHER

Nothing it's just this will just end up going to your head.

FATHER

What?

MOTHER

You're going to take this and say hey I know what I'm doing, didn't I say I would get us through this? And then you're going to think you have it all figured out until the next time this happens.

FATHER

Hey what are you talking about.

MOTHER

I'm sick of this. Don't you think I've had enough. We go through this over and over again, when will this ever be over?

FATHER

Hey, come on.



MOTHER

Now because of this you're going to be so delighted with yourself, like you always know what to do.

FATHER

Hey, come on.

MOTHER

Do you even remember how much it hurt me, when you had to go to jail? And Alex was a little baby? And I had to take care of him all alone, and we weren't sure if we were going to make it?

FATHER

Hey of course I remember. Look I'm sorry, I didn't want for that to happen, any of that.

MOTHER

And you kept overlooking the health inspections and cutting corners, don't you know how scared I was when we almost got shut down? We had a family to take care of, we were about to lose everything!

FATHER

Look I'm sorry, I was irresponsible, I was -

MOTHER

And every time, we somehow manage to scrape by. And you have that look on your face. Like you never made a mistake. And you just say it'll be okay and forget about what it was like for the rest of us.

FATHER

Hey, I know, I know

MOTHER

Just stop it, I can't take it -

FATHER

Honey, I

The two of them draw closer.

MOTHER

I don't want to go through this again.

FATHER

I don't either.

The two of them embrace.

FATHER  
I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

INT. RESTAURANT

Mother and Valerie are sitting at a table sharing a meal.

MOTHER  
So how are things going?

VALERIE  
Not bad.

MOTHER  
Have you been doing well in school?

VALERIE  
Yeah, I'm doing better, but I'm  
also more busy.

MOTHER  
That's good, what are you busy  
with?

VALERIE  
Just clubs and stuff.

MOTHER  
Meet any boys?

VALERIE  
Mom.

MOTHER  
You don't have to tell me.

VALERIE  
Actually, I've had a hard time with  
boys.

MOTHER  
Meeting them?

VALERIE  
No.

MOTHER  
Y'know when I was your age, a  
little younger actually, there was  
this boy who used to chase me.

VALERIE  
Mom. No way.

MOTHER

Mhmm things were more conservative those days, one day he came to our house after school. I had gone to the library so I wasn't there.

VALERIE

So what happened?

MOTHER

My mom opened the door. He said, hi I'm Jim.

VALERIE

(laughs)

I'm Jim?

MOTHER

My mom told me about it later, he even imitated him.

VALERIE

Have you told dad?

MOTHER

No I haven't, don't tell your father about Jim.

VALERIE

Why?

MOTHER

He doesn't like Jim.

VALERIE

Do they know each other?

MOTHER

Oh yeah.

VALERIE

Mom, you never told me about this.

MOTHER

Well you never asked.

VALERIE

What made you choose dad?

MOTHER

Oh I never really liked Jim. And your father was very handsome, very charming when he was younger.

VALERIE

Mom, please.

MOTHER

I didn't know what I was getting into when I married your father. But I love him for whatever it's worth.

VALERIE

Aw, that's so sweet. What was your mom like?

MOTHER

She was quiet. But funny. She was always trying to keep me safe.

VALERIE

Do you guys still talk?

MOTHER

We do, pretty often.

VALERIE

I wish I could see her more.

MOTHER

Yeah, it's a long flight.

VALERIE

Do I even need to find a boy?

MOTHER

(laughs)

When the time is right, you'll find him.

INT. RESTAURANT

Father is working alone, cleaning up. Kyle comes in and is agitated.

KYLE

Dad could you turn off the lights?

Kyle runs around and closes all the windows.

FATHER

What are you doing?

KYLE

Just turn off the lights.

FATHER

Kyle what's going on?

KYLE

Oh my God, oh my God, oh my God.

FATHER

Kyle what's wrong.

KYLE

Oh my God. No one was supposed to be there. He just came out of nowhere.

FATHER

Be where? Who came out of nowhere?

KYLE

It all happened so fast. We were just supposed to go in and go out.

FATHER

What happened so fast? Go in and out of what?

KYLE

I don't think they saw me. It was too dark.

FATHER

Who saw you, Kyle what's going on?

KYLE

The cops.

FATHER

What?! What cops?!

KYLE

Oh my God, oh my God.

FATHER

Kyle, what happened? Did you rob someone's house?

KYLE

I didn't mean to do it. It just happened so fast.

FATHER

Kyle what happened? What happened so fast?

Kyle pulls out gun.

KYLE

I think, I think I killed him.

Sirens.

POLICE

We have the place surrounded. Come out with your hands up.

Father looks back at Kyle and starts beating him.

FATHER

You stupid fool!

KYLE

Ow! Ow!

FATHER

You idiot! You thief! You idiot!  
You stupid stupid fool!

Father beats him through the door into the kitchen. He beats him into the middle of the kitchen. He beats him behind and under one of the cooking tables, cursing him the whole way.

FATHER

Don't move.

Father exits the kitchen. Camera stays on Kyle. Sounds of police entering the restaurant.

FATHER

Dont' shoot don't shoot! Aah!

Sounds of police slamming Father into a table. Sound of handcuffs. Sound of police and father leaving the restaurant. Sirens grow faint and disappear.

INT. RESTAURANT

Valerie and Kyle are waiting around. Alex enters.

ALEX

Hey.

VALERIE

Hey Alex.

KYLE

Hey.

ALEX

Hey mom will be here in a bit. Want to start cooking?

VALERIE & KYLE

Sure.

The three of them start cooking. They set the table and are ready but wait at the table for mother before they start eating. Enter mother.

MOTHER

Hey guys.

ALEX, VALERIE & KYLE

Hey.

MOTHER

Your father is doing okay. We're still not sure what's going to happen.

The three children absorb the news.

ALEX

Let's eat.

The family eats. Credits roll.

Benjamin was born in New Jersey on September 1st, 1995. He and his family moved to Houston in 1999. He attended the University of Texas starting fall of 2013 where he quickly took to film-making in addition to his studies. He graduated in 2017 and is open to continuing to pursue film in the future.